

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

October 2007



The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

VA REACHES OUT TO FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON - Do you know any former prisoners of war (POW) or their family members? If so, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) needs your help. VA is once again reaching out to former prisoners of war not currently using VA benefits and services, urging them to contact the Department to find out if they are eligible for health care, disability compensation and other services. In recent years, VA has expanded benefits to all former POWs with strokes and certain common heart diseases. More than a dozen other diseases were already covered. VA also extends a helping hand to the surviving spouses and family members of former POWs, who may be eligible for certain benefits and services. (See the following article.)

During recent years through a nationwide outreach campaign that included direct mailings and the help of news media and veterans organizations, VA has added hundreds of former POWs to its compensation rolls, people who had not previously been receiving benefits to which they were entitled.

VA estimates more than 25,000 former prisoners of war are alive today. VA is trying to contact the remaining POW's not receiving any benefits or health care through an outreach program that includes asking citizens to pass the word to veterans they know.

The government's effort to inform former POWs about improvements in benefits faces a particular hurdle with older veterans who may not have been in touch with VA for decades. A majority of former POWs are veterans of World War II, and their military service was before the use of Social Security numbers as military "service numbers." As a result, it is difficult for VA to track down those who have not been in contact with the Department in recent years.

If you know a former POW, please ask him or her to contact VA at 1-800-827-1000. Details about benefits and services available to former POWs and family members are available at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/index.htm>

VA BENEFITS FOR FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR (VA

Factsheet) Former American prisoners of war (POWs) are eligible for special veterans benefits, including enrollment in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical care for treatment in VA hospitals and clinics without copayments as well as disability compensation for injuries and diseases that have been associated with internment. These benefits are in addition to regular veterans benefits and services to which they, as veterans, are entitled.

Congress has defined a prisoner of war as a person who, while serving on active duty, was forcibly detained by an enemy government or a hostile force, during a period of war or in situations comparable to war.

Compensation: Studies have shown that the physical hardships and psychological stress endured by POWs have life-long effects on health and on social and vocational adjustment. These studies also indicate increased vulnerability to psychological stress. The laws on former POW benefits recognize that military medical records do not cover periods of captivity. For many diseases, unless there is evidence of some other cause, VA disability compensation can be paid on the basis of a presumption that a disease present today is associated with the veteran's captivity or internment.

For POWs detained for 30 days or more, such eligibility covers any of the following illnesses that are found at a compensable level (at least 10 percent disabling): avitaminosis; beriberi; chronic dysentery; cirrhosis of the liver; helminthiasis; irritable bowel syndrome and malnutrition, including associated optic atrophy. Also covered are: pellagra and any other nutritional deficiency; peptic ulcer disease; and peripheral neuropathy, except where directly related to infectious causes. Several categories of diseases are presumptively associated with captivity without any 30-day limit: psychosis; any anxiety state; dysthymic disorders; cold injury; post-traumatic arthritis; strokes; and common heart diseases.

Spouses of veterans who die as a result of service-connected disabilities are eligible for Dependency and

Indemnity Compensation (DIC). Spouses of former POWs who were rated 100 percent disabled and who died of a condition unrelated to their service also may be eligible, depending on the date of death and how long the veteran held the 100 percent disability rating. Those non-service-connected deaths prior to October 1999 are covered if the former POW had been 100 percent disabled for at least 10 years. More recent non-service-connected deaths are covered under a law that provides the benefit when the former POW was 100 percent disabled for a year or more.

Medical Care: Former POWs receive special priority for VA health-care enrollment, even if their illness has not been formally associated with their service. Former POWs are exempt from making means test copayments for inpatient and outpatient medical care and medications, but they have the same copay rules as other veterans for extended care. They also are now eligible for dental care without any length-of-interment requirement.

Additional Resources: Former POWs may contact VA regional offices with general benefits questions at 800-827-1000. Medical eligibility questions may be directed to 877-222-8387. Additional information for former POWs also is available from VA's Web site at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/>.

VA PTSD PSYCHIATRIST GIVEN "GENIUS" AWARD (VA News Release) WASHINGTON -- A Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employee in Boston, Dr. Jonathan Shay, has been awarded the so-called "Genius Award" from the MacArthur Foundation. Dr. Shay, the author of two popular books, *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America*, about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), has been a VA staff psychiatrist treating combat veterans with PTSD since November 1987.

Dr. Shay was one of 24 Americans who each recently received a \$500,000 grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, one of the nation's largest philanthropic organizations, for "exceptional merit and promise of continued creative work." Dr. Shay combines a study of classic literature with 20 years of experience treating veterans in Boston to explain PTSD to both the public and health care professionals.

Besides working for VA, Dr. Shay has also worked with the military services and the Defense Department in a variety of capacities to foster an understanding of PTSD, improve military leadership and strengthen ethics training for the military.

IMPORTANT DATES IN OCTOBER

October 1 payments for September due

October 8 Federal holiday - Columbus Day

October 9 last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 11-01-2007 payments

October 23 last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 11-01-2007 payments

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 **1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications **1-877-823-2378**

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

Foreign Medical Program Office (medical treatment abroad) -
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 **561-649-6489**
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 **1-800-697-6947**

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 **1-888-244-6711**

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: **www.va.gov**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) **www.warms.vba.va.gov**

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessioned homes): **www.ocwen.com**

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: **www.floridavets.org**

St. Pete Regional Office: **www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete**